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< Chapter Eleven: Zara and David V (/en/story/127504/chapter/chapter-ten-angelique-vi-882976/)

This is nothing but the continuation of that story I left unfinished before. I won't write down a fifteen-line preamble about what led me to that situation. I won't elaborate, I won't be detailed, I won't

interfere.

I simply don't want to.

I'm drunk, very drunk.

I feel like I couldn't write this chapter of my life if I weren't.

Maybe I'm weak.

I don't know, nor do I want to think about it.

The little ego I have left tells me that a weak person couldn't keep trying to survive after everything that has happened, but the voice that speaks to me just before I fall asleep keeps telling me that I'm only doing it for the sake of that girl.

I don't know, maybe they're both right.

Do you mind?

No, right?

You're not obligated to keep reading, or anything like that.

Actually, being honest, I don't want you to keep reading.

This part of me, the one that still feels a little ashamed, wants you to throw this

paper out the window.

Maybe you could... just skip this part of everything I've written.

Is it really worth it?

And I ask myself: is it really worth it?

I don't know.

Damn, there's so much I don't know.

There's so much about myself that I still don't know.

Despite the thirty-something years of life I lived, I still don't know what I believe in, or what my own ideals are.

If I told you everything...

Yes, this book isn't for myself, it can't be my redemption.

It could never be.

Because if all these pages are worth for somthing, it's just to remind myself, to discover to Angelique, and to reveal to the world, how low a person can fall...

...

And how little their convictions can be worth. Perhaps Angel would say that I'm

being too hard on myself, but...

...

I don't know.

. . .

"A-ah, shit... I really can't..."

"Hold on."

I helped David sit against a street light post; his face drenched in sweat and his fingers trembling. He gripped his abdomen, where blood seeped through his shirt. Asking much of him was futile in his weakened state, but we couldn't afford to waste any time. I had grown accustomed to the pain in my leg and could walk without much trouble, so I carried David's rifle as we made our way around the block. Shooting would have been too much for him, anyway.

As we rounded the corner, the grand cathedral stood tall amidst the ruins of the city's devastation. Its walls bore scars from

bullets and explosives, evidence of the conflict that had consumed that once peaceful neighborhood. Yet, the structure remained intact, and we could see no signs of occupation by enemy forces. Silence reigned around us, with no sounds of motors or gunfire nearby.

"Can you keep going?"

"Guh... you're cruel, man..."

"This place is chaos. I- yeah, I'll take you to the cathedral."

"Hm?"

"Yeah, there I... I can bandage you or whatever. A kilometer is not that much, but it's enough for the blood lose to make you lose consciusness and-"

Suddenly, a distant explosion echoed through the air, leaving me momentarily silent. David let out a pained sigh, knowing all too well that he couldn't hold on much longer, and shook his head slightly.

"Alright, fine. We stop ten minutes at the cathedral, you patch me up and we keep going, yes? I don't even want to think about staying out here enough time for those planes to appear again."

"That's the idea. I want to leave France as soon as you. And we'll surelly be taken off of combat after this so-"

"Yeah, yeah. You wanted to save time? Then stop losing it... h-hm..."

He attempted to get up on his own, but I hurried to help him up as I had done before. We had only fifty meters to go until the large doors of the Vieux Lyon Cathedral, which we walked without any problems. Throughout the journey, I could feel David's heavy breathing; he almost collapsed onto the ground twice. The blood that was oozing from his clothes and gear continued to soil my clothes and soak my skin. Knowing that my friend's blood was flowing fleetingly down my side and leg was... terrifying, in its own way. We

stopped in front of the large doors, but they were so firmly closed that we didn't even think about trying to open them.

"I think..."

"What is it?"

"I think I saw the door at the right open or..."

I nodded at the words of the pained redhead and took a step back, needing to do so because the structure of the church itself prevented me from seeing the two side doors if I stood in front of the main one. Then when I turned... I saw the trail of blood that David had left behind. Drops, drops, drops, and red paths that went from the post to where we were. I almost felt myself fainting, but my body didn't move an inch.

"Alez...?"

I tried not to think about anything. I took a few steps to the right and peeked

around the corner of the structure. 'Open' wasn't the right word; the doors to the right had simply been destroyed by some stray explosion and laid in large pieces to the sides, along with concrete and shrapnel.

I dragged David with me and we crossed the threshold, hoping that perhaps the interior of a holy temple, even if it was in ruins, would give us some peace. That wasn't what we found.

Yes, the church inside was a shadow of what it must have been before the attack, but there was a detail, a simple and small element of trivia that I recalled I had read once. In situations of conflict, when a city is besieged or under siege, churches and temples are commonly used as temporary hospitals. I never knew exactly why, never thought about it too much, so I would never have imagined that was the case on that occasion.

"Alez, wait."

As soon as we crossed, we stopped half a meter inside. It wasn't the stained-glass windows, or the statue missing half its body, or the hundreds of decorations that took our breath away. It was the sight of dozens of injured people being tended to by others who ran in silent desperation to help those who approached death. They were all civilians.

As expected, they noticed our entrance in a matter of seconds. Perhaps they were scared to see our uniforms, perhaps they thought we were going to take the place for ourselves, perhaps they thought I was there to kill them when they saw the gun hanging on my chest.

A wounded elderly woman restrained her scream, lying on one of the benches in the church, with half her face bandaged and a large red stain on her green coat. I just raised my hand to them, trying to communicate as best I could to let them know I posed no threat, but three apparently healthy men stood up and each drew a weapon from a different place in

their clothes. One was an old man of at least eighty years old, with a very long beard and red eyes; he pulled a revolver from inside his coat. Another was a teenage boy who couldn't stop crying and sobbing; he carried a shotgun. The last was a clearly trained adult, who drew a pistol made in that same country from the back of his pants in an instant.

They didn't even give me time to think about raising my rifle.

"W-wait you-"

"*Ne bougez pas!*"

The hoarse-voiced old man yelled and pulled back the hammer on his revolver, surely trying to intensify the threat that his finger on the trigger already posed.

"N-no! Wait! He's- he's hurt!".

"*Ce sont des soldats. Que faisons-nous?*".

"*Celui-là est blessé*".

"*Devons-nous les aider?*".

"*Non. Je ne sais pas à quel camp ils appartiennent. Mais que se passe-t-il si quelqu'un de l'autre camp arrive? Ils vont sûrement nous exterminer*".

"I don't know what are you..."

Should I have taken the chance to raise David's rifle and open fire? It was clear that I was at a disadvantage. However, it's not unreasonable to think that I could have emerged victorious given my military training. The worst part was undoubtedly the anxiety that gripped me as I watched them talk amongst themselves, deciding what to do with us, without being able to understand a word they said. My nerves were close to the edge. Meanwhile, David continued to bleed out, his breathing becoming more rapid, his fingers trembling, and his moans growing louder and...

"*...les deux sont blessés. Regardez la jambe de cet homme*".

"*S-si nous les tuons... N-nous leur enlevons leurs armes...*".

"*Nous ne sommes pas des meurtriers, gamin*".

"*Q-qui s'en soucie dans c-cette situation?!*".

"*Non... nous ne le ferons pas*".

"*Quelle langue parle-t-il?*".

"*Je pense qu'il parle allemand. Ne suis pas sûr*".

"*Avez-vous vu un de ces rebelles parler allemand?*".

"*J'ai même vu un enfoiré parler parsi. Je ne vais pas prendre le risque*".

I had to kill them. I needed to create a distraction and take them out right then and there. Maybe then I could grab a first aid kit and properly treat David until we reached the evacuation point. I was going to do it. I even planned out how. I would throw David out while pretending to toss a grenade, which I didn't actually have. If I was lucky, they would be more concerned

about protecting themselves from the explosion than about David and me, and I could take my companion behind the wall and face the three of them without worry. Yes, that's what I had to do. I even had something to use as a grenade: a flare. After all, if they were just civilians, they wouldn't question it before getting out of the way when they saw me throw something lit. Yes, I was going to do it. I was about to do it. I gritted my teeth, gathered my courage, and...

And that son of a bitch David let out a painful laugh.

"... let's leave, Alez."

"...eh?"

"Yeah, we're leaving."

"But, David!"

"Can't you see they don't want to help? They're gonna shoot us if we insist."

"B-but I can..."

"No, Alez."

Upon our words exchange, the three men tightened their grip on their weapons. I turned my gaze towards them, and then David raised his voice. He coughed a little while saying the first words, but then he managed to express himself much better.

"*Ne vous inquiétez pas, messieurs. Nous partons*".

Up until that moment, I had forgotten that David could speak some French. I didn't understand him, but it was clear he was telling them that we were leaving. Then he nodded his head at me, signaling that we should go.

"..."

I almost resisted leaving. No, my mind resisted leaving, but my body took control and I turned my back to the men and started to walk away, exiting the death trap that was the blown-out door of the cathedral.

It was unbelievable. If only I had been able to communicate better, if I had been less intimidating or if I had at least tried harder to make my intentions clear, maybe they would have agreed to give us some help.

And there he was, hanging from my arm with his face progressively turning pale.

"I feel... I'm going to fall asleep."

"J-just a little more, man. Just a little more. It's... just a kilometer. Just a thousand meters and we're safe."

"Tsk- haha... don't talk to me like I'm a sad kid. Okay, okay. I'll hold on. If Kyd didn't kill me back in Agordo, some fucking rubbish won't do it either."

"..."

I didn't want talking to distract me for even a nanosecond. I quickly located the street that bordered the river and started walking down it. I moved as fast as I could without running. The distant sound of

airplanes, explosions, and gunshots filled the air. Luckily, there was no sign of anything up ahead, not even the allied outpost, but I assumed such an important location wouldn't be visible and exposed to enemy fire.

I turned my head to look at the river, and I could see flames on the other side. As we walked, we came across several bridges to cross, but they had all been blown up or were filled with wrecked vehicles. All we could do was walk, keep going, and pray, perhaps. So, I silently prayed that everything would be okay, that we wouldn't encounter any more enemies, that we wouldn't see any more horrors, and that David wouldn't lose consciousness.

I prayed a lot. Maybe I prayed too much.

...

You know? As I recall that day, I wondered if perhaps I had prayed too much. I had never been to church or been

truly devout. I was not the one who prayed before going to bed or had God in his mind when waking up. I questioned whether my selfishness had been too much, asking, begging, almost demanding that God help us in such a terrible moment. I thought maybe I had been foolish to expect something from him when I never devoted myself to faith. I thought perhaps...

"That..."

The roar of the engines made us both look up at the same time. A Mirage crossed the sky right above us. I could almost say that I perceived the exact moment when its fuselage casted a shadow on us, and although it was probably my imagination, I even remember reading some inscriptions it had under its wings. Time had stopped. I couldn't even feel fear.

When the wind hit my face, I panicked once again. Ignoring both the devastating

pain in my leg and the deplorable state of my brother, I started running.

"Turn in, Alez! Turn in!"

Following David's shout, I turned a corner searching for the entrance of a building that could serve as shelter. David looked behind us and shouted something about the plane turning towards us. I was fortunate to spot, next to an elegant two-story house halfway down the block, the entrance to a basement. It was one of those wooden doors at a 45-degree angle from the ground. If it was open, it was clearly our best alternative. I tightened my grip on David and ran, ran with all my might.

"FUCK!!"

The entrance was blocked with heavy chains and an imposing lock.

And then I heard the engines again.

But... I'm not sure. I don't know if I

actually heard the engines or if my fear of hearing them again took over my ears. All I know is that I let go of David. I let him drop to the ground so I could pick up the AUG and empty almost the entire magazine into the metal lock.

Honestly, I didn't hear a single shot. I couldn't even hear whatever David shouted as he got up on his own, struggling under the weight of the radio on his back. I couldn't hear when the machine guns' bullets began to strike the ground, or when the chains fell as I opened one of the wooden doors with all my strength, making it bounce back on its own hinge. No, the engines... were too loud.

All I could perceive was the darkness of those stone stairs leading to the basement. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw my partner finally standing up, but by then I had already decided to go down... alone.

The plane flew over us, and the terror of what was about to come caused me to lose some control of my own body and

stumble, horizontally spinning in the air and looking up as I fell into the darkness.

I saw David getting ready to enter the basement, experienced night in broad daylight as the Mirage shadowed us once more, but I felt nothing as I watched the door I had opened close again. It wasn't a big deal, David just had to open it as forcefully as I did, an action that took him less than a second. But it was a second, a very valuable second, that he couldn't afford to lose, and yet he lost due to an unfortunate accumulation of my own mistakes.

Had I stopped him from going back to the ground floor in that hotel, had I carried the radio myself, had I decided to take a route that didn't expose us so much to the sky, had I prioritized him going down the stairs first...

I felt a blow to the back of my neck.

I fell asleep.

And my last thought before fading away, bouncing down the steps was...

'...I made a mistake.'

. . .

I woke up with more pain in my head than in my leg. To say that the basement was dark didn't do it justice, I really couldn't see anything, except... for a few beams of light that were coming from the top of the stairs, whose doors were closed but had holes in them.

"...".

It took me a couple of seconds to gather the strength to prop myself up on the ground and slowly lift my upper body.

One of the beams of light was shining directly in my face, and it didn't allow me to see much.

"David...?"

I murmured to myself, piecing together

my shattered memory bit by bit. I tried to see my body, but I couldn't, so I focused on my sense of touch, and indeed, I was unharmed. I had survived the Mirage attack.

"David... David! Where are-?!"

I looked down and to the side, and found his face illuminated by another beam of light. He had his eyes closed, and his skin was already as pale as snow. It was terrifying to see the contrast that the bright blood flowing from his mouth, nose, and ears created. So, so bright. The ferric liquid shone so much that not even his hair could rival it.

He was motionless. Not even a hint of a movement. I couldn't even see if he was breathing. I approached him with little agility, using my own hands to support me. I placed one of my palms near him, and it immediately got soaked. I could... I could feel the warmth of that liquid dripping through my fingers. Looking at him

closely, I almost screamed as I gradually understood the situation I was in. I refused. Vaguely like Oedipus, stubbornly evading the reality in front of me to the point of harming myself, I tried to convince myself of what was not.

"D-david... let's go..."

The closer I got, the more parts of my body were bathed in David's blood. My hands, knees, forearms, and feet. The little sanity I could maintain was used to focus on feeling my way around his body in the darkness.

I could hear a sound, like applause, coming from outside of the world I had created around David and myself. We were supposed to make our way to the allied post, where we would meet our companions and hopefully be taken out of danger, or at least treated for our wounds and be given a well-deserved rest.

Finally, I was behind what little I could see of David's body, crawling on my hands

and knees with my hands gripping his shoulders. I could barely feel the weight of his motionless body. I tried to pull his clothes, but my arms had lost strength. Was it weakness? Had I been injured? Was it fear? No, it wasn't weakness, because I managed to grip him even tighter. I could feel the blood that already adorned my hands dripping as I squeezed harder, but I ignored it. Nothing in this place was real. I had perfectly blocked out any thoughts that could break the thread of my sanity, and nothing could bring me back to reality.

"H-hey... hey... let's go, David..."

I pulled on him.

I barely managed to move him.

So I pulled again.

Another type of noise could be heard, but I can't really remember what it was like.

I pulled again.

This time, harder.

Yes, harder.

Hard enough to make me lose my balance and sit back on my heels.

I let out a groan, and this time I could clearly hear a... a sound like... like a cookie crunching, like a bone breaking, or like a knuckle cracking.

David's body moved, and what surprised me the most was how light it felt. It was nothing like the David I had been dragging with me for so long. No, it was much, much lighter.

Such a difference in my companion's weight made me very curious, so I began to shake him very, very gently, as if hoping he would explain to me exactly what was happening.

I slowly lifted my head to see beyond, and found the same beam of light that moments ago illuminated David's face, now focused on his abdomen.

His abdomen.

His abdomen, which was not there.

The little that the holes in the basement door allowed of sunlight to sneak in illuminated a... a red mass. Red and bright. The wet edges of what reflected the photons expelled by the sun flickered weakly, like the reflection of tiles at the edge of a pool. I stopped to observe the detail more closely and... and the blood flow in my brain stopped.

There was nothing left of David from the navel down. The skin of his stomach had been torn and burned, and everything that would correspond to his pelvis and beyond was an amorphous mass of red, which gushed blood and quickly mixed with the organs escaping from his split torso. The bone of his spine could barely be seen amidst such a mixture of viscera and various fluids, although the part of it that still remained attached to his upper half was visible above the red pool.

I don't know how long I remained like that, still and unable to move. I couldn't take my eyes off of whatever it was that hung from his body, pulsating violently

and releasing more and more plasma.

Gradually, maybe second by second, a horrible ringing began to sound in my ears. After a while, it became so loud that I couldn't even hear my own thoughts. The edges of my vision darkened even further, and I didn't know if I could only see that same point because of the dim lighting or because of my tunnel vision.

I let go of David's clothing and let one of my hands fall to my side. The same clap from before was heard again. I brought my hand to the front and saw it full, bathed in blood, and realized that the previous sound came from my body as it came into contact with the small crimson puddle around me.

David was dead.

Not only that, but his body had been almost obliterated. When my entire mind exited that little universe I had created, a terror unlike any I had ever felt invaded my soul. I ejected backwards and let out a scream that even to myself sounded gut-wrenching. The sense of smell I had lost

due to the shock returned to me, and the nauseating stench of blood and burnt human flesh reached my nose, almost causing me to vomit. Pure instinct made me bring my palm to my face, as if trying not to smell that again, but then I felt my nose and cheeks warm and wet; I had stained my skin with blood.

Every movement I made, anything I could do that wasn't closing my eyes, sank me deeper and deeper into the hopeless pit of reality in the most horrific way possible.

Like a lost child, I screamed once again, and again, and again, perhaps hoping that my screams would be louder than that heavy ringing that had occupied in my head.

I tasted iron in my mouth, a result of the blows I had suffered when I fell, but in that moment I could only think that somehow, someway, for some reason, it wasn't mine, but David's.

The room went from black to white with a single snap, and yet I couldn't see or hear anything. Even the grotesque remains of

David were lost from my sight. I went from feeling horror at the dead human in front of me, to an incalculable anguish after realizing that the dead was my companion. My brother, one of my guardians, the only one who ventured to try to be my friend.

How could I face Zara after this?

How could I stand before her and tell her that our beloved friend had passed away, and that we wouldn't even be able to properly give rest to his body?

How could I meet her gaze and reveal to Zaralyne, with only a single wound on my leg, that David had died because of me without feeling disgust, sorrow, shame, or the urge to end my life then and there just to escape this putrid feeling of guilt that invaded and consumed me, making me not even want to return to my team?

I took a deep breath, and the room went black again as the red stench entered my nostrils.

Then it went white again.

Intermittently, my surroundings

switched back and forth between the gruesome rawness of his corpse and the catastrophic end of his existence.

I sprang up, embraced the rifle that once belonged to my comrade, and without looking back, I ran away.

I don't know, I don't know where I ran to. I don't know because the universe turned completely white again once I stopped seeing those crimson remains. I just know I left the place as fast as I could. Maybe I went up the stairs, or maybe I found another way out from inside the house. I have no idea. All that occupied my mind at the time was to escape from there, to get away as far as I could from the result of my own selfishness. Yes, the world didn't turn black again, but... the white never left. I only remember running and running and running without having a clear direction, just keep moving without being able to see the street, the buildings, the sky, nothing. I even forgot about the pain in my leg. The agitation of my breath was also insignificant in the face of the colossal weight of my own thoughts. My

own psyche was destroying itself by constantly reminding me that everything, everything had been my fault; I was destroying myself; autolysis.

I don't know how long it took me to run that much, and I don't know if I was aware of the path I chose to take or if it was just chance, pure coincidence.

The only thing that broke the monotony of my white surroundings was a shout that made me stop out of sheer instinct. When I came to my senses, I was about ten meters from the entrance of a dark, traditional bar that was lost among the other buildings. There was a soldier at the door, raising his rifle and pointing it at me with his finger on the trigger, ready to take me down as a potential threat. I couldn't say anything, my lips trembled and, despite having regained some of my consciousness, I still couldn't utter anything coherent. His weapon was the same as mine, as was his uniform, and maybe that prevented him from shooting me on sight.

Another guard came out of the place and pointed at me, and a third positioned himself behind both of them and started shouting words at me that I don't remember. That man looked back, as if confirming something with someone inside the bar, and then patted the back of the first soldier, who lowered his weapon and ran towards me to take me by the arm and start dragging me inside. I didn't resist, I simply couldn't. The second man tried to take the rifle from my arms, but that only made me hold onto it more tightly. There was another exchange of words and the man gave up.

I crossed the threshold and, although I don't remember the interiors well, I do remember seeing many faces like mine, and I was even able to recognize some. My legs, perhaps on their own will, had taken me to the meeting point that had been communicated to us by radio.

The people tried to talk to me, to get information out of me, to calm me down, but nothing could even make me utter a

word. Perhaps realizing it was in vain, they placed me in a wooden chair in a corner of the place, covered me with a blanket, and left me alone, shaking in solitude as I watched them with dead eyes.

If I don't go into detail about the interiors, it's simply because I can't remember them. Everything looked blurry, dreamlike, fake. Only the people were clear to visualize, and they went from one place to another without stopping, without even asking me how I was. It's not like I could answer them, anyway.

Hours passed, many hours. Perhaps a day or two passed, maybe a week or a month passed. I don't know, I no longer had a conception of time.

Regardless of how much time had passed, a woman's voice eventually 'awakened' me. It was a clearly recognizable voice engaged in an argument with someone else. I lifted my head and saw them on the other side of the room. My desolate eyes met hers, and the older woman rushed towards me with a mix of

desperation and relief. Almost stumbling, she made her way to the chair I was sitting in, and without hesitation, she embraced me almost in tears. She smiled with an uncharacteristic vulnerability.

"A-Alez! You're okay! Thank... thank God you're fiine! I heard they lost contact with you guys and I've trying to learn more since then. You're... soaked in blood. Did they check on you? They treated your wounds? You look terrible..."

Zara tried to contain her emotions upon seeing me and gripped my shoulders with considerable force, bombarding me with a flurry of questions, until she finally asked the one that I didn't want to hear.

"Combat is waning, this place is done for. Even our enemies have retreated, we only need to wait for a bit and they'll come for us. You'll be fine, Alez. Where's David? He left you here and went on to help the sentinels?"

"David..."

After a long time, I spoke again and let my head fall, I saw the AUG in my hands and let everything out like a machine whose brake had just been removed.

"This... this is David's rifle. I lost mine. We got separated from the french we were with and we both got wounded, although he had it much worse. We avoided danger as much as we could and then tried to take refuge in a church, but it was already occupied. We escaped from both the enemy units and the planes, but the planes eventually found us. When we did find a shelter, we were hit by their machine guns. I survived, barely scratched, but David died. I thought I could bring him to a safe zone despite his injuries, but we didn't expect to be hunted again by those fighter planes. The projectiles destroyed his body and he died on the spot without me being able to do anything. Despite everything, I should have brought him with me, but..."

I gathered strength to lift my gaze once more and found Zaralyne's pale face, with her big eyes almost in a state of shock, moist and trembling. She didn't say a word before bursting into tears, letting whole rivers of silent tears run down her smooth skin. She hugged me again, but now holding me to her chest as if she were the one trying to comfort me. Without speaking, only sobbing, she caressed my nape and that was when I realized that I would never be able to forgive myself for what had happened. The knot in my chest was too much to keep inside and I let myself go just like her, wrapping her in my arms, joining in her tears.

. . .

I think it's been... ten years since then.

And I can't erase it from my head.

The pain, the anguish, the guilt, everything...

Still... I still have nightmares of that

basement, that wake me up in the middle of the night, and I know I'll never be able to sleep peacefully again.

Never.

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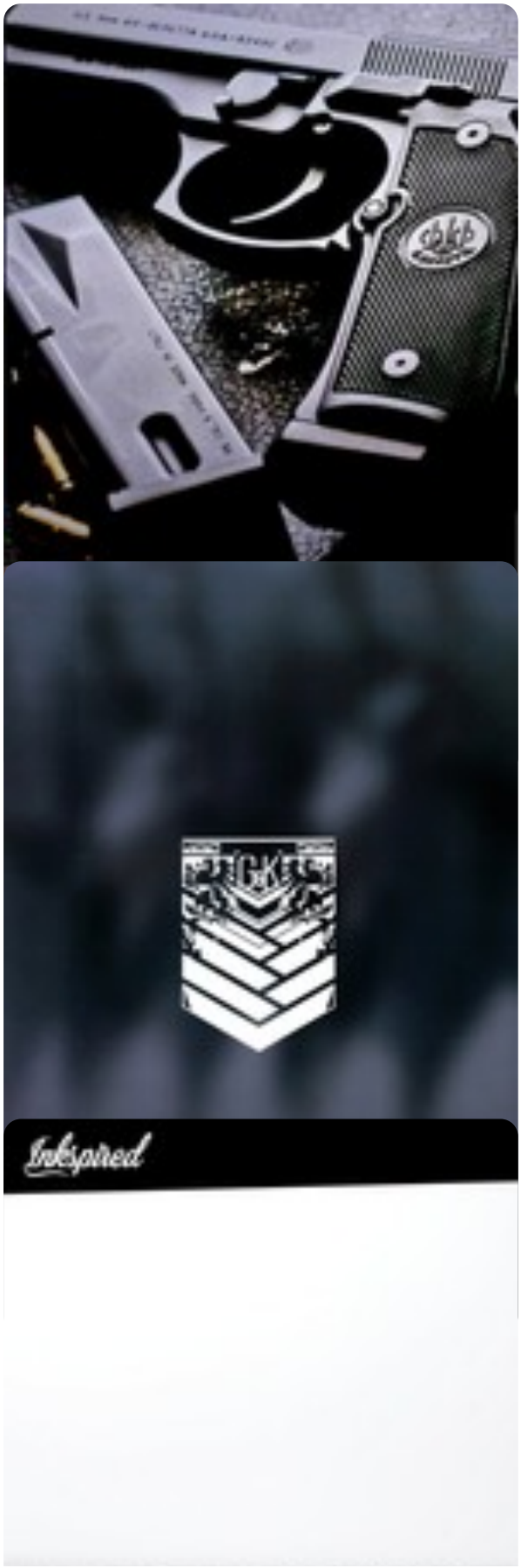

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Events & Writing Contests (/en/events/)

BETA readers network (/en/beta-readers/)

Become an ambassador (/en/ambassadors/)

Writing tips (/en/blog/944/writers-blog/)

Community Groups (/en/communities/)

Latest Newsletter (/en/newsletter/)

SUPPORT

Community Guidelines (/en/community-guidelines/)

Verified Stories (/en/verifiedstories/)

FAQS (/en/faq/)

Advertisement and
Sponsored content (/en/sponsored-content/)

Contact us (/en/dashboard/getSupport/)

Privacy Policy (/en/privacy-policy/) Terms of use (/en/terms-of-use/)